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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIRUT 000471

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STATE FOR NEA/ELA, NEA/FO:ATACHCO

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TAGS: KDEM PGOV PREL PTER LE

SUBJECT: LEBANON: HARIRI ENCOURAGED BY SUMMIT; SEEKS HELP  
ON PARLIAMENT, TRIBUNAL, SMUGGLING

Classified By: Jeffrey D. Feltman, Ambassador. Reason: 1.4 (d)

SUMMARY

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¶11. (C) Mustaqbal Party leader Saad Hariri believes statements made at the Arab Summit on the opening day of March 28 were helpful to the March 14 cause, as were private discussions between the Saudis and Syrian President Asad. Hariri was unaware of the applicability of UNSCR 1747 on Lebanon, but gave some recommendations as to how to use the Resolution to help rid the country of Syrian influence. Hariri will ask upcoming visitors -- UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, German Chancellor Merkel and CODEL Pelosi -- to push Speaker Berri to convene the Chamber of Deputies. As for the dialogue with Berri, Hariri said he had gone as far as offering three opposition-aligned candidates to take the place of the "independent" minister in a 19 10 1 cabinet formula, but that Berri had remained intransigent. Hariri expects Syria to resume using violence in an attempt to dissuade Lebanon from establishing the international tribunal. He asked the USG to talk up the chances of a Chapter VII Resolution on the tribunal as a negotiating tactic; he also believes the French are working to line up Russian support for Chapter VII. Hariri claimed to be working with Palestinian groups to control Fatah al-Islam, and expressed his suspicions of LAF G-2 Commander Georges Khoury. End Summary.

A GOOD SUMMIT

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¶12. (SBU) The Ambassador called on Mustaqbal Party leader Saad Hariri March 28 at the Hariri residence in Qureitem. Former MP and Hariri advisor Ghattas Khoury attended the meeting, as did Polchief (notetaker). Hariri was in an upbeat and confident mood after the opening day events at the Arab Summit in Riyadh. He and Khoury highlighted for us in particular the helpful statement of UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who praised Prime Minister Siniora's "impressive leadership" and urged the international community to support "his democratically elected government." Also helpful were King Abdullah's condemnation of the opposition for "turning Beirut's streets into hotels" through its ongoing "sit-in." According to Hariri, the remarks had "punched around" President Lahoud at the Summit, but that the dour Lahoud didn't care.

¶13. (C) Joking about "America's friends," Hariri also noted

that Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi condemned the attempt to establish an international tribunal to investigate and prosecute the assassination of his father Rafiq Hariri and other recent political violence in Lebanon. Hariri said that Qaddafi had decided to side with Syria and its allies in Lebanon, including Baathists like the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (whose aims include uniting the Fertile Crescent, including Lebanon, under a single government headed by Damascus). The Ambassador noted the irony that Speaker Nabih Berri's side in the Lebanese political crisis is now supported by Qaddafi; like many Lebanese Shia, Berri blames Qaddafi for the presumed 1978 murder of their spiritual leader Sayyid Moussa Sadr.

¶4. (C) Egypt came out strongly in favor of a return to the original Arab League proposal for Lebanon, based on a 19 10 1 cabinet formula, and pushed the Summit to endorse that proposal. Cairo is "fed up with Asad's lies," Hariri said. Hariri took the opportunity to chide the USG for "scaring" Mubarak by pushing aggressively for reform in Egypt, but not in Syria, as he put it. When Mubarak is worried about losing his grip on power, he becomes less confrontational with Syria and more likely to "protect" Asad.

SAUDI-SYRIA

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¶5. (C) Hariri reported that Prime Minister Siniora was received March 27 by Abdullah, who asked Siniora what he should ask of SARG President Asad during their meeting scheduled for later that day. Siniora asked the King to press Syria on arms smuggling first and foremost; the tribunal; delineation of the borders of the Shebaa Farms; diplomatic relations between Damascus and Beirut; and

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political violence in Lebanon. Hariri did not tell us whether the King raised these issues with Asad during his two-hour meeting later, but claimed that Asad spent much of the meeting apologizing to the King for heaping scorn on him and other Arab leaders last year for their stance on the Israeli-Hizballah War. Nevertheless, the King was unconvinced by Asad's apology, and insiders do not expect a Saudi-Syrian reconciliation, according to Hariri. (Note: Lebanon's pro-Syrian press is trumpeting just such a reconciliation. End note.)

¶6. (C) The Ambassador asked whether the rumored Saudi strategy of driving a wedge between Iran and Syria is realistic. Hariri said that under the Saudi strategy, Iran would one day have to choose whether it wishes to defend Syria or Hizballah. Both would be bad for Lebanon, the Ambassador noted. Meanwhile, Hariri continued, Hizballah is sending more teams to Iran for military training. According to Sayyid Ali al-Amin, the anti-Hizballah Mufti of Tyre, Hizballah is carrying out these activities in the open. Sooner or later, Hariri predicted, there will be a conflict either within Lebanon or with Israel, and "everyone will lose."

UNSCR 1747

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¶7. (C) When asked, Hariri admitted that like most Lebanese he had not focused on the recently-passed UN Security Council Resolution 1747 laying out additional sanctions on Iran. The Ambassador noted that the Resolution also prohibits Iran from exporting weapons, and as a Chapter VII Resolution imposes a legally binding obligation on member states to stop Iranian weapons exports. A Chapter VII Resolution targeting Hizballah is quite an achievement, and Lebanese leaders should raise the profile of this important development. Hariri suggested the USG should use satellite imagery to catch Iran and Syria in the act of smuggling weapons to Hizballah, and that the international community should push the UN to send a letter warning Damascus on its activities to

aid Hizballah.

PARLIAMENT

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¶8. (C) The Ambassador noted that, to avoid complicating Hariri's talks with Berri, we have been relatively quiet on the issue of Nabih Berri's refusal to convene the Chamber of Deputies in advance of the Summit. Nodding in approval, Hariri said he would ask UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to press Berri on this issue when Ban comes to visit after the Summit, and that he would ask German Chancellor Merkel and House Speaker Pelosi to press Berri also during their visits.

Hariri suggested that the USG adopt a position linking the closure of the Chamber to Syrian influence; "There are some in Syria who are trying to make the Chamber theirs." The Ambassador agreed and noted that even after the passage of UNSCR 1559, which demands a halt to Syrian meddling in Lebanon's parliament, Syria is still interfering.

BERRI DIALOGUE

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¶9. (C) Hariri confirmed that he would see Speaker Berri after the Summit, but he expressed frustration at odds with the public optimism he and Berri had displayed during the last two weeks. He told us he had gone as far as he could in trying to sell Berri on the 19 10 1 formula, even offering such figures as former MP Tamam Salam, Jean Obeid (a once-pro-Syrian former Foreign Minister with ties to Nazek Hariri), and Assam Araji, a Sunni MP from Elie Skaff's Zahle Bloc. Finally, while he claimed they did not discuss presidential candidates in specific, Hariri told us that Berri warned him, "I didn't let your father choose a president; what makes you think I will let you?"

¶10. (C) Against the background of their stalled dialogue, Hariri urged us to tell Berri that his bet on Iran is a mistake, and that March 14 possesses strong allies too. He also urged us to give Berri the impression that a Chapter VII Resolution to establish the tribunal is a done deal, to put pressure on the Speaker to compromise on its establishment in

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Lebanon.

USING VIOLENCE TO STOP THE TRIBUNAL

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¶11. (C) "Our information from the Syrian side," Hariri continued, is that Damascus will not accept the tribunal under any circumstances. Syria will "escalate with assassinations" and buy more time to forestall the court's establishment. Hariri confirmed that the Summit time is a dangerous one that could hold assassinations, because Damascus can more easily appear innocent in the midst of major world and regional events. Khoury noted that Damascus operates on this principle and reminded us that journalist Samir Kassir had been murdered just after the arrival of German prosecutor Detlev Mehlis.

¶12. (C) Nevertheless, Hariri reported, President Chirac had assured him the tribunal would be enacted by Chapter VII and had told Russian President Putin the tribunal "must happen." Chirac will soon visit Putin with this message, Hariri claimed. Meanwhile, Hariri said he plans to send the tribunal documents to the Chamber of Deputies, making a formal demand for its passage, this week.

OTHER SECURITY ISSUES

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¶13. (C) On Fatah al-Islam, accused of organizing the Ain Alaq bombings in February, Hariri said that other Palestinian groups with which he is close are helping to solve the problem. Finally, Hariri expressed skepticism about Georges

Khoury, head of Lebanese Armed Forces intelligence. He has a large and powerful institution but is doing nothing with it, he noted. (Note: Other March 14 leaders have made the same observation and believe that Khoury is eager to advance his long-shot presidential ambitions by adopting the same "neutral" pose that kept his Commander, General Sleiman, from intervening against opposition protesters in January. End Note.)

FELTMAN